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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

AN ADDRESS

TO THE REPUBLICAN CLUB
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
AT ITS SIXTEENTH LINCOLN
DINNER, FEBRUARY 12, 1902

BY
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ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

FORTY years have passed since the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln. His great secretaries and military commanders, his lieutenants in Congress, his staunch allies, the war governors of the States, the great intellectual, financial and political leaders of that far-off time, his friends and his enemies both North and South, who could properly be called his contemporaries, are all, or nearly all, at rest. Even the youngest of the boys who fought for and against him begin to be warned by the dimmed eye, the heavy ear, or the faltering step, that the time draweth nigh.

The president of to-day was in his cradle forty years ago. A new generation has come, to whom the stress and storm and passion of the great Rebellion are but as a story that is told; and even to the oldest of my hearers the fife, the drum, the tread of marching feet, the clash of arms and the roar of cannon are an echo and a memory growing ever dimmer and more distant.

During these forty years a thousand books have been written and published about Abraham Lincoln, and ten thousand essays and addresses. His career has been described and his character has been analyzed; he has been placed and sung and glorified till history and philosophy and eloquence and poetry are exhausted and no new thing remains to be said.

But while, as each new anniversary arrives, we can only say the old things, it is fitting and proper that the old things should be said; and it is certain that they will be said and that they will be said every year

more simply and reverently and sincerely. We cannot praise him; we cannot glorify him. We cannot describe him;—no words are simple and majestic enough but his own. I can think of no commemoration on an occasion like this quite fitting and adequate, except the Gettysburg address, the second inaugural, and a few moments of silent thankfulness to Almighty God for Abraham Lincoln.

And yet we must remember that such deep feelings of reverence and gratitude are not native to the human heart—they do not come spontaneously to each new generation—but are born of study and of reflection; and, therefore, it is necessary that new books should be written and new addresses be made, and that the old things should be said and said again.

In the few minutes allotted to me to-night I suppose it is not very important or material what special features of his career or his character or his teachings I endeavor to recall.

Mr. Lincoln in a marvelous way embodies the history and character of the American people. The tragedy of his life, like the tragedy of the nation's life, takes root a long way back. It was in Virginia that the first African slaves were landed. It was a Virginian, Colonel Mason, who said, in the Federal Convention: "Slavery brings the judgment of Heaven upon a country. As nations cannot be rewarded or punished in the next world, they must be in this. By an inevitable chain of causes and effects Providence punishes national sins by national calamities." It was a Virginian, Thomas Jefferson, who later said of slavery: "Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; and that his justice cannot sleep forever." When the

national punishment came, it was Virginia that suffered most. In Virginia the great tragedy came to an end; and it was in Virginia that the father and mother of Abraham Lincoln were born. Thus the tree of healing springs from the Old Domain where the national disease was first planted.

It is, perhaps, due to slavery that this father and mother can neither read nor write; that he is shiftless, inefficient and nomadic. It is, perhaps, due to slavery that we see the future president born as in a manger, amid surroundings the most barren, hopeless and depressing. No angel of the Lord warns the shepherds of his advent. No star comes and stands over where the young child lies. No Wise Men of the East visit his cradle. And had vision warned and star directed and were the wise men here, they could not worship: they could not believe that this rude log cabin, without window or door, on this barren farm in Hardin County, Kentucky, holds the saviour of a nation. To the Wise Men of the East no place more unlikely to cradle a great statesman than the hovel of this vagrant "poor white"; just as to the Wise Men of the West no place more unlikely to cradle a great, rugged, humane man of the people than the mansion of a merchant prince here in New York! Yet these things happen. Fortunately under our form of government neither Hardin County, Kentucky, nor New York City is barred. Fortunately the merchant prince as well as the wandering pioneer may be father to a president. Fortunately under our Constitution we can avail ourselves of wisdom and of worth wheresoever they spring.

Regarding Mr. Lincoln, the important thing is, of course, to comprehend what he became, what he did

and what he taught; and yet we love to dwell on the “becoming”—the early processes—and to go over the dramatic outward incidents of his life.

We follow him from Kentucky into Indiana. We see him at school there, in the open woods all day and by the firelight after the day's work is done. We take interest in his college days; we see him at his athletics in that wide, leafy, whispering gymnasium of his—axe in hand—building him a body of iron; and we see him in his library with the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress and Shakespeare and the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States; and somehow we know that these professors of his, Moses and David and Isaiah and Bunyan and Shakespeare and Washington and Jefferson, and the great World of Nature and Human Struggle and Suffering, are never in the future to be in anywise ashamed of their handiwork.

In 1830 we see him moving his family, with their scant and meager chattels, westward to Illinois; we see him on his southern journey floating slowly down to his first shuddering contact with human slavery;—that thing which he said “had, and continually exercised, the power of making him miserable.” We see him hunting his place in the world of work; he is a farm laborer, a flatboatman, a clerk, a small merchant. He meditates becoming a blacksmith. He is a captain in the Black Hawk War. He becomes a surveyor and a postmaster, and finally devotes himself to the study and practice of the law.

We see him lifted and ennobled by the joy and the pain of a great and tender love. How pathetic the story of Ann Rutledge! He stands by her dying bed;

he follows her to the grave; darkness overwhelms him; he sits at night with a friend, unnerved, trembling, tears trickling through his fingers, racked with the thought of the snow and the rain upon her grave; for months he is on the verge of insanity;—and the shadow is on his face and the melancholy is in his eyes that are to remain there and grow deeper to the end.

Always after this we feel the man to be above and outside the things he is doing, and apart from them. He does not seem ambitious. He does not seem to struggle. He seems to move patiently forward, faithfully performing the tasks as they come. He serves in the legislature; he practices law; he is elected one term to Congress; he finds it disappointing; he applies for the General Land Office, and fails; he goes back to the practice of his profession, giving up, as he thinks, politics for all time.

And now, after a considerable interval of quiet professional life, comes an ominous and fateful year. The period of mutual restraint, North and South, is at an end; slavery must be extended and live, or it must be restricted and die; the Missouri Compromise is repealed and the great battle has begun.

Fifty-four marks the beginning of the last decade of Lincoln's life. It marks the beginning of his ministry. Now we are to find what manner of man he has become and what place he is to hold in the history of the nation and of the world.

Biography should be read backward—first find what, at maturity, a man was and did—all else is incidental—and Mr. Lincoln's should begin here. From this on, he stands always in the white light.

From this on, we can see for ourselves the great patient purpose driving, the great intellect executing, the great heart suffering. From this on we need take no man's word for him; we may study Lincoln direct; we have an authentic record—twelve hundred printed pages of his own words—his letters, speeches, messages and proclamations.

And what a marvelous record it is! Let any young American who seeks the true image, the unbroken melody, take up this record first—and last. And if he shall come to the task a little skeptical; if his observation in a peaceful and prosperous age shall have taught him that things are not always what they seem, that high power and high character are not always found in high places, that reputations are sometimes manufactured, that public opinion is often wrong; if he shall come to the task in a spirit tinged with cynicism; with a vague impression or suspicion that Lincoln's place in history and his hold on human hearts was won by a mere shrewd, good-natured, story-telling politician; that his nomination was in part an accident and in part a compromise; that some or many of his doings and sayings will have to be apologized for; that he was a man who drifted with the current and who happened to be at the head of affairs during a highly critical period; that under pressure he developed good capacities indeed, but that he was so placed as to reap the glory of other people's achievements; that the manner of his death, and the time of it, set a halo and mystic glory around him which make just criticism and sound judgment impossible;—if, I say, the young American of this or any future generation shall sit down to read that record

with such prepossessions, or with any of them, he will rise up ashamed! He will rise up with the feeling that those twelve hundred pages, recording the thoughts, feelings, purposes, triumphs and sufferings of the last decade of Lincoln's life, make a book matchless since the Bible! It will be to him like a spiritual baptism—a new birth! And ever thereafter, when he listens to the words of any man, however great, however eloquent, about Lincoln, he will feel that he has the measure of the speaker or the writer, perhaps, but never the measure of Lincoln; he will feel ever more deeply that Lincoln, looked at through the eyes of any man however sympathetic, is simply Lincoln diluted, Lincoln lessened; and he will turn back unsatisfied to Lincoln's own printed pages and recorded words.

Oh, the strength and the grandeur of that record! Oh, the beauty, the gentleness, the tenderness of it! It seems to-day, forty years after, fresh-wet with tears; the blood-stains are not dry; the prayers still beat up to Heaven! The meanest of us rises from it awe-stricken, with bated breath, humbled, comforted, inspired—with something of that heroic heart new-growing in his own; with something of those melancholy eyes new-shadowed in his, with something of that dauntless courage and invincible purpose knitting itself into his innermost being. There shines the mind, there throbs the heart, there moves the divine undeviating purpose! Twelve hundred pages of words pressed out like drops of blood and sweat by a great civil struggle—burned out in the fiery furnace of war! No hatred, no scorn, no pride, no exultation, no selfishness, no weakness of any kind

anywhere to be found ! Every page with something to moisten the eye, to stiffen the will, to exalt the aspirations, to illumine the intellect, to set the heart throbbing or the nerves tingling ! On every page some sentence that flashes like a search-light or rings like a rifle-shot ! No other such record to be found in all literature !

Just after the Republican national convention in 1860, Mr. Beecher said to Mr. Raymond: "Your candidate [Seward] would not do in a crisis like this ; he has too much head and too little heart." "And yours," said Raymond, "has, I fear, too much heart and too little head."

Mr. Phillips, sincere to the core, refusing to misstate his real views even by the coffin's side and under the pressure of universal sorrow, said : "No matter now that unable to lead and form the nation, he was content to be its mouthpiece and representative."

Had he "too little head" ? Was he "unable to lead and form" ? What does the record show ?

Take for a moment the great debate with Douglas, which really began in 1854 and lasted until 1860. What shall we expect of this debate ? Mr. Lincoln has a great reputation for humor ; he has been born and has grown up and has always lived on the border ; he is supposed to be deficient in education ; his audiences are supposed to be rude, rough, pioneer audiences. What shall we expect, then, of this debate ? Wit, anecdote, personalities, keen thrusts, excess of emotion and ornamentation, a tinge of coarseness, something of blare and breath and broadness ; much to be apologized for and excused, yet all to be re-deemed by a certain rugged strength and sincerity —

and occasional flashes of insight and foresight proving him a native, though untrained, undisciplined genius? Will the form and manner be crude and faulty, the matter bold, audacious and free even to lawlessness?

We read, and rub our eyes astonished! It is all so simple, so lucid, so logical, so chaste and unadorned, so tremendously earnest, and oh, so ineffably fair and candid and kind! No laughter, no personalities, no play upon the emotions, no tricks of oratory; nothing but the light of reason and the steady fire of moral conviction. He does not dazzle nor drive nor overwhelm: he wins; he melts; he persuades; he steals his very enemies away from their most cherished beliefs. We read the speeches of others and we say: "What an orator! How bold! How brilliant! What learning! What logic! What power!" We read this long debate and we say: "How was it possible to think or feel otherwise?"

And as for lawlessness! It was Mr. Beecher, of Brooklyn, who wanted it graven on his tombstone that he "scorned and spit upon the fugitive slave law"; Mr. Lincoln said: "Every provision of the Constitution must be obeyed in good faith." It was Boston that condemned that Constitution as a league with hell; Mr. Lincoln maintained it was the Ark of the Covenant.

How shall we mark the great mind, the real leader, in public affairs? Must he not be the man who most fully comprehends existing conditions; the man whose aims are highest, broadest, most far-reaching, and most steadily maintained; and the man who applies to existing conditions those measures best calculated to work the result desired?

Measured thus, what shall be said of Mr. Lincoln? In 1854 he understood, better than any other man, existing conditions North and South. He comprehended the entire slavery question. He saw and pitied the bondage of the blacks. He also saw and pitied the bondage of the whites. "He who would be no slave," said he, "must have no slave." Slavery was slavery to whites as well as to blacks. The institution was not only morally wrong—it was materially destructive and wasteful. It ate up, it wasted, the power and virtue of both races; and it ate up the power and virtue of the very soil. Its steady tendency was more land, more slaves—less product. It must be extended to live; confined to the old slave states it would destroy itself. He saw this. He saw, too, the bondage and the blindness of the people of the North—their servility, their cowardice, their moral lethargy. He saw a part cringing, pliant, prostrate; a part dully indifferent; almost all, in 1854, selfishly engrossed.

Thus he understood the conditions in 1854. He understood something else. He understood the Constitution: he revered, he worshipped the Declaration of Independence.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. This Mr. Lincoln confessed as the substance of his religion, and this was the very pith and core and essence of his political faith and teaching. It was his religion, his morals, his politics, and his statesmanship. "Thy neighbor as thyself," translated into government, meant to him, "All men are created free and equal."

He believed in the Declaration of Independence. He believed that the sufferings, the life-and-death struggles of the Revolutionary Fathers, lifted them for the time being to new heights of spiritual vision; and that in the end they conquered not merely the armies of King George, but they conquered themselves and Old World prejudices and inherited evils and errors. The Declaration was the source of all his political sentiments; he frequently said so. It is the text of all his political teaching and the motive of all his political measures. It runs like a strand of gold through the whole fabric of his life. It is the very background and atmosphere of the picture—the theme and melody of the whole majestic composition—“All men are created equal—all men are created equal.”

He believed in equality—in that attitude of mind under which society says to each new soul as it appears, not, “What have you?” not, “Whence come you?”—race, caste, class, color?—but simply, “What are you—what can you do?”

Lincoln believed in equality. It was not “a self-evident lie”; it was not a mere glittering generality: it was a great political and spiritual truth; it was a wide-sweeping, all-embracing, life-giving principle;—the very sun of the true social and political system.

He not only believed in the Declaration as a religion, but he understood it as a policy—he saw more and more clearly, as time went on, the extreme wisdom of it. He saw more and more, as time went on, the spread of intelligence that lay in it, the growth of virtue that lay in it, the increase of wealth that lay in it, the perpetual harvest of patriotism, of manhood, of

national power, to spring from that simply stated truth if really understood and faithfully followed.

And how has history justified his faith! It is a great argument for equality that it has made us rich; it is a greater argument that it gave us that splendid army of volunteers in '61; it is the greatest argument that when our existence as a nation hung in the balance, when the Declaration itself was on trial for its life, this doctrine of equality gave to us, gave to that army and gave to humanity the life and services of Abraham Lincoln.

Now one more factor in the problem. He appreciated the value of the Union. The Union was everything. The extreme abolitionists, hating slavery, were demanding immediate, universal emancipation; otherwise, disunion. The extreme Southern leaders, understanding slavery—that it must be extended or die—were demanding extension or disunion. Mr. Lincoln saw that to give up the Union was to confess the failure of free institutions before the world—the inability of democracy to maintain itself in a crisis. It meant the negro abandoned. It meant weakness, waste and perpetual warfare—if not chaos—to North and South. The anti-slavery cause, the cause of the Constitution and of the Declaration all hung on the preservation of the Union.

Restrict slavery, give it no new land to feed on, let the nation as a nation stand once more on the Declaration, preserve the Union, and slavery will starve and suffocate. The spirit of slavery and the spirit of the Declaration “cannot stand together. They are as opposite as God and Mammon; and whosoever holds to the one must despise the other.” This he said to

the people of Illinois in 1854; and in 1858 he tolled forth the same warning to the nation: "A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divided."

Thus Mr. Lincoln, understanding slavery and hating it, understanding the Declaration, the Constitution and the Union, and loving them, framed the issue: Slavery is wrong; it shall not be extended, but restricted and left to destroy itself; the Declaration is right, and shall be restored; the Constitution shall be preserved and the Union forever maintained.

This was the broad issue. Lincoln made it in fifty-four; he made it broad; he kept it broad. On this issue thus framed the whole battle was fought from fifty-four to Appomattox.

Is there no evidence here of intellect, of understanding, of real leadership?

The position taken and maintained in this great debate was not compromise—as many charged then. It was a wide view of the present, a far view into the future—as we understand now. It was not compromise in any sense; it was complete comprehension, complete wisdom, complete sanity. Mr. Lincoln was always supremely sane.

We love the leader of a forlorn hope; we love the man who will sacrifice all for a cause; we admire the man who speaks out—who utters all that he thinks or feels—and even a little more out of excess of courage and sincerity; the heart leaps in sympathy with him who will not equivocate, will not excuse, will not re-

treat a single inch, and who will be heard ;— and even with the blind old fanatic who, single-handed and alone, takes up arms against a nation.

Such things awe and dazzle us like a storm. But beyond the roar and dazzle of the storm, above the angry cloud, behind the thunderbolt, is the Firmament, is Providence, is Supreme Intelligence and Changeless Purpose. “God dwelleth in eternity and has an infinite leisure to roll forward the affairs of men.” And as the scales fall from our eyes, shall we not more and more see and feel how much greater, grander, and more sublime is the silent, suffering, intelligent patience of Lincoln than the holy scorn and righteous, tempestuous wrath of these others ?

And so, the clouds growing all the time thicker and the thunder pealing all the time deeper and nearer, the period of debate came to an end, and the period of action arrived. The nation, blind and tormented, was feeling about for its deliverer ; and we cannot believe that the hand that groped in darkness was left to chance or fortune ; we must believe that it was by some divine guidance that it rested finally upon Abraham Lincoln ; and he was chosen president.

With that pathetic farewell to his friends at Springfield, he journeyed down to Washington. We know what he finds there. Mr. Buchanan, willing, as was said, to give up a part of the Constitution, or even the whole of it, if perchance he might save the rest, had left everything undone that ought to have been done. A great rebellion had been inaugurated. Mr. Lincoln confronts not mere ill-controlled mobs risen against the very idea of government, but seven sovereign states—later eleven—fully organized, officered, armed,

equipped, with all the machinery of government running smoothly and all compact and united for the protection of a vast material interest. With the seceding states have gone senators, representatives, secretaries, federal judges, foreign ministers and consuls, army and navy commanders, inferior officers, heads of departments and clerks without number—carrying over to the enemy all their resources of knowledge, skill, experience and leadership—depriving the federal government of its very memory and leaving every department confused, unnerved and paralyzed. Hidden disloyalty, more deadly than open desertion, lurks in every branch of the civil service. No man knows whom to trust. The treasury is empty. Arms, arsenals, ships, navy yards, fortifications and garrisons have been betrayed or abandoned. Foreign governments are unfriendly, prejudiced, and ready to intervene. The people of the North are torn with conflicting views. For them no obvious material interest is at stake—their lives are not threatened, their property not endangered; and on the question of right and wrong public opinion is for the moment divided, confused, without form and void. For the moment darkness is on the face of the deep; and even when the light dawns and the dry land of righteousness, the granite peaks and fertile plains of loyalty, appear, there also appear here and there throughout the North the bogs and swamps and rotten morasses of sordid self-interest, secret sympathy, and silent treachery!

To bring order out of such chaos, to put down such a rebellion is the task confronting the new executive. And it is not enough to restore order and put down the rebellion; it must be done without the destruction

of popular institutions; without injury to free government; it must be done in such a way as to make the Union, when restored, as nearly as possible a real Union; it must be done in such a way as to leave no wasting wounds—no incurable diseases in the body politic.

And more: the crisis is new in human experience. There is no history, no precedent to go to. Rebellions have indeed been put down, but not by such governments as ours. The very material Lincoln has to work with is of a new sort. Napoleon put down a revolution, but the people had long been accustomed to despotic rule. There was civil war in Cromwell's time, but the people were wonted to one-man government. But here is a people, free, peaceful, unused to arms, jealous of power, and accustomed to no government at all in the Old World sense. Thus out of the character of our people and the form of our government a hundred vast and perplexing questions arise that are not only new here, but new in the world.

To such tasks under such conditions comes Abraham Lincoln, of Springfield, Illinois, attorney at law, aged fifty-two, commercial rating three thousand dollars, besides homestead exempt. He comes without military experience, without diplomatic experience, without any experience at all, we may almost say, in the administration of large affairs. His personal acquaintance is small. He is a stranger to his own party, and that party, really a minority party, is new and strange to itself—made up of discordant elements bound together only by a determination that the Union of the whole country must and shall be preserved.

The tasks are gigantic enough; the conditions to

the last degree perplexing ; his experience and preparation almost nothing.

On the other hand, there is the just God in Heaven whom he trusts ; and there is the American people whose temper and power he understands. He trusts in God ; he understands the American people.

The American people ! Ah, there was the arsenal ! There was the courage, there was the conscience, there was the overwhelming power ! Latent, dormant for the time being, yet there was the power ; there it was, spread across the continent like a sleeping sea ! There it lay in the hearts of some millions of common American men — and boys — and women ! There it lay as it lies now, in the stored intelligence, skill, conscience, self-control, devotion, and invincible courage of the American people. Intelligence, conscience, strength, heroism were common then — as they were three years ago — as they are to-day. What we had then, what we have now, was, and is, an almost limitless store of human skill and capacity. It was this which constituted our real wealth then. It is this which constitutes our real wealth and strength to-day. This Mr. Lincoln understood. He knew the common people. He knew the farm boys who could be turned into captains and colonels — good enough in time of war. He knew the canal drivers, the real-estate agents and the tanners who could command armies and win victories. In his special message to Congress — July, 1861 — he said :

“It may be affirmed without extravagance that the free institutions we enjoy have developed the powers and improved the condition of our whole people beyond any example in the world. Of this we now have a striking and impressive illustration. So large

an army as the government has now on foot was never before known without a soldier in it but who has taken his place there of his own free choice.

“But more than this : There are many single regiments whose members, one and another, possess full practical knowledge of all the arts, sciences, professions and whatever else is known in the world, and there is scarcely one from which there could not be selected a president, a cabinet, a congress, and perhaps a court, abundantly competent to administer the government itself.”

It was this high and sympathetic estimate of the talent and capacity of the American people which enabled Mr. Lincoln to rally and make effective the real strength of the country.

We cannot follow him in detail through those four years of blood and fire—we cannot tell the story of the war—but there it is in that record ! There you see him pleading with the South ; uniting the North ; holding on to the border states ; watching the newspapers ; watching elections ; watching public demonstrations ; watching Congress ; controlling the various executive departments ; flanking copperheads and peace Democrats ; flanking his own unreasonable friends ; flanking regiments of office- and commission-seekers, as well as regiments of rebels ; raising troops ; creating a navy ; studying maps ; planning campaigns ; making, encouraging, stimulating, rebuking and un-making generals ; protecting the public credit ; pondering foreign relations ; solving great constitutional problems ; encouraging and comforting his soldiers and his people ; issuing a steady stream of messages, proclamations, decisions, and various state papers,—all calm,

matured, prudent, eloquent, wise ; destroying four million slaves and putting in their places four million free men ; rebuilding from the outside loyal state governments ; collecting and spending millions upon millions of wealth ; holding as in the hollow of his hand the lives and properties of more than half a continent ; wielding a power really as great and absolute as any despot ever had in history, yet exercising that power reluctantly, mercifully, and with scrupulous and painful regard to every constitutional limitation and every individual right.

There he stands for four awful years, hasting not, resting not, looking forward and backward, surveying all, controlling all, caring for all, like Fate or Providence itself. Calmly he takes each man's censure ; steadfastly he reserves his judgment. Nothing too soon ; nothing too late. The people must have time to think ; the battle is theirs. Emancipation cannot come at once ; its necessity must be seen ; the border states must, if possible, be held. McClellan must be kept a while ; — till the people and the army can see him as he is. Negro regiments will not do at first ; but negro regiments come as Northern prejudice melts. On this general and that, on this question and on that, he bides his time. The present is not all : there is the future. The army is not all : there are the people. In the midst of a war, the most gigantic of modern times, every move and measure must in sixty-four and in accordance with the Constitution be submitted to the people ; the people, therefore, must be held as well as fields of battle ; — for democratic measures will never save the nation.

And so in the fullness of time all is submitted to

the people and by the people approved ; and the war goes on and the great task is finally performed. The clear, simple, definite issue conceived and stated by him in '54 has been fought out. Slavery is abolished ; the Declaration restored ; the Constitution intact ; the Union maintained. Was this not leadership ?

We know from many speeches delivered on that journey from Springfield to Washington that Mr. Lincoln, while confident as to the purity of his purpose and the strength of his devotion, was deeply and sincerely apprehensive as to his wisdom and capacity. Let us hope that in those last bright days in early April, 1865, when he was down there at City Point sending in glad tidings hour by hour to the stern old lion of the War Department—the victory sure, the burden lifted—that he allowed himself a little pleasant human consciousness of the greatness of his leadership and the grandeur of his achievements ; that for one fleeting moment he opened his heart to

“ The gentle pride and joy of noble fame.”

Great as was Lincoln's intellectual endowment, it was not his greatest.

“ A power was his beyond the touch of art
Of armèd strength ; his pure and mighty heart.”

The heart of Abraham Lincoln ! Here let us speak reverently ; we are on holy and sacred ground !

We may pass over the dry, uninteresting, unpoetic virtues. His life was pure ; he practised and advocated total abstinence ; he had no vices ; he was scrupulously honest and scrupulously truthful. These things make an admirable man, but not necessarily an adorable one. Lincoln was adorable ! His soul seems indescribably spacious. The mere cataloguing

of admirable characteristics with incidents and illustrations will convey no adequate sense of his spiritual greatness, yet this is all we can attempt.

Take his loyalty, his faithfulness, his deep and abiding reverence for his country's institutions. He hated slavery. Notwithstanding this, he said: "We are under a legal obligation to catch and return the run-away slaves. I confess I hate to see them hunted down and carried back to their stripes and unrequited toil, but I bite my lips and keep quiet." And at another time he says: "If slavery is not wrong, then nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel. And yet I have never understood that the presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. It was in the oath I took that I would preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath, nor was it my view that I might take an oath to get power and break the oath in using the power."

Thus in every emergency we find him slow and reluctant in the assumption and exercise of unusual or extraordinary powers and swift and eager in laying them down. To him the law, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, are sacred and holy.

He was very anxious about the election in 1864. Doubtless he had some wish for personal approval and vindication, but we cannot see this personal motive in him very strong. We know he was weary; we know he was heavy-laden; we see him as pictured by Carpenter, gazing out toward the Virginia horizon and repeating to himself:

"How sleep the brave who sink to rest
By all their country's wishes blest;"

and he goes on : “ How willingly would I change places with the humblest private who sleeps to-night on the banks of the Potomac.” This was his deep mood ; the end was drawing nigh for him ; he had passed through the fiery furnace ; the desire for earthly reward cannot have been pulling very hard at his heartstrings then ; but he believed that the fate of the blacks, the fate of the nation, the fate of humanity, hung upon that election ; and he was extremely anxious for Republican victory. And yet, desiring it so much, wielding a power so vast, observe how fair, how just, how scrupulous he is !

Consider his unselfishness. See how devoted he is to his cause and how careless of his own personal success — how inconsiderate always of Abraham Lincoln. In '54 he gave way to Trumbull to make sure of a vote in the Senate against the extension of slavery. In '58 he deliberately risked defeat by Douglas in order to make sure of national Republican success in '60. In the Douglas canvass he says : “ I claim no extraordinary exemption from personal ambition ; that I like preferment as well as the average man may be admitted : but I protest I have not entered this hard contest solely or even chiefly for a mere personal motive.”

We cannot think of Lincoln as in the ordinary sense ambitious. Public affairs do not present themselves to him as an arena, a race-course, for Abraham Lincoln ; but as a field or a vineyard to be made fruitful for the common good. We do not see him going forth and seizing place and power as men do in easy and prosperous times ; we see him accepting burden and responsibility.

When he comes to the presidential chair, how free he is of all consciousness of self, how unspotted by pride of any sort, how extremely careful of the feelings and prejudices and honor of other men, how careless of his own. The first inaugural is so pathetic in its appeal to the seceding states that it has been criticized as unmanly. To the border states he said: "I do not argue—I beseech that you make arguments for yourselves."

All there is of Abraham Lincoln—pride and dignity and honor and reputation—every feeling and emotion of just and proper resentment—everything, indeed, but principle—he is ever willing to sacrifice to attain the great end.

Greater than all this was his justice, his fairness toward the South, his sympathy with the Southern people, his magnanimity toward even the leaders of the Rebellion.

In the matter of slavery the South was guilty, but the North was not innocent. The South kept slaves, but the North used the sugar and cotton and so shared in the profit. This was his position always. "God gives to both North and South," he said, "this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense cometh."

He did not slur over or ignore the guilt of secession, but if you will observe him throughout the four years of his service, with the press misrepresenting him; radical anti-slavery leaders stabbing him; the public misunderstanding him; the governors and the generals complaining of him; his enemies jeering; his friends faltering, doubting and scolding; with armies meeting disaster after disaster; with the Union he loved shat-

tered into fragments; with the slavery he hated securing perhaps a still firmer foothold; with the cause of popular institutions trembling in the balance; with the shriek of the wounded, the groans of the dying, the wail of the widowed and fatherless, ringing in his ears; torn, wounded, bruised, crushed in every way; suffering as only One suffered;—there yet is not a note of scorn, not even an epithet of hate, not a word of bitterness in all that matchless record. Oh, the greatness of it! Oh, the majesty of it! No-where any room for malice or hatred or cruelty or revenge. Magnanimity given higher meaning; Christian charity, wider boundaries! Old meanings and old boundaries broken through and forever cast aside! A new magnanimity defined, a new charity, wide-arching and unfathomable as the firmament itself—and as beautiful—and as full of life and light!

He had the gentlest, tenderest heart that ever beat. He could be firm. General Grant wired in August, 1864, that he was unwilling to break his hold where he then was. To which the president replied, "Neither am I willing. Hold on with a bull-dog grip and chew and choke as much as possible." This is an order stern and strong enough to please the most resolute, and yet we know he had the gentlest, tenderest heart that ever beat. It was always so. Riding across the prairies of Illinois with his fellow-lawyers on the circuit, he discovered one day some new-fledged birds blown too early out of the nest and in great distress. He stopped, dismounted, gathered the little frightened creatures in his great hand, and hunted till he found the nest and put them back. Walking down a street of Springfield on one occasion after his return

from Congress, he found a little girl weeping. She was to go on a journey, her trunk was packed, the train was almost due, but the baggage-wagon had not come. It was all arranged in a moment; and a huge ex-Congressman, with a trunk on his shoulder and a little girl by the hand, reached the station just in time. William Scott, a lad from Vermont, stood guard one night in place of a sick friend. The next night he was detailed on his own account. He was found asleep, tried, condemned, and sentenced to be shot by his own comrades. And thereupon the great, gentle-hearted president of the United States, commander-in-chief of the army and navy, throwing aside all his overwhelming cares and duties, went in person to Chain Ridge and hunted up William Scott, and investigated the circumstances and issued such orders that William Scott died a martyred hero fighting for his country, and not a condemned and disgraced traitor.

Hundreds of such instances are known. He is always saying, "It will do the boy no good to shoot him." Everywhere you find yearning and pathetic appeals for opportunity to pardon. He never seeks excuse for severity — but always excuse for clemency. He is always trying to evade what he calls "this butchering business." His tenderness of heart is by no means confined to questions of life and death. He appeals to have a boy's pay restored. "Loss of pay falls so hard upon poor families." He wants no stain or shadow upon any soldier's record for immaterial causes. Nothing more impresses you in his letters than the effort he makes to wound no man's feelings unnecessarily. When he says it pains him not to make the appointment asked for, you know it does. His sym-

pathy is not assumed — it is not diplomatic ; it is not “a glove of velvet on a hand of steel ;” it is deep, sincere, inexhaustible. This is not a hand of steel at all, but a warm, kind, human, ungloved hand of flesh and blood.

With so much gentleness, tenderness and sympathy, no wonder he is described as —

—“That spirit fit for sorrow, as the sea
For storms to beat on.”

And how the storms beat and what suffering is his ! His proclamations plead and pray. His military dispatches sob. “How is it now, how is it now ?” he asks. How pathetically thankful he is for every bit of good news. “A thousand thanks for the relief your dispatches give me.” He suffers, but he does not flinch ; he does not stop his ears ; he will, he must, know all, feel for all, care for all. Yet each added month of torture finds him gentler, kinder, tenderer. He loves most who suffers most. Nothing in all that record to incite any man to hate ; not a page to harden any man’s heart ; nothing that does not seem to cleanse and melt. “Die when I may,” he said a little before the end, “I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow.” And so through all this rude business of battle he planted flowers to the end.

His religion was to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with his God. How deep, through all his fiery trials, was his trust, how simple and sincere his faith, how complete his submission. “And thus having chosen our course,” he said in the beginning, “without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew

our trust in God and go forward without fear and with manly hearts." And toward the end, "The purposes of the Almighty are perfect and must prevail. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge his wisdom."

He was not a self-made man, nor a luck-made man, but a God-made man. God needed him and God made him. God guided and sustained him. "And he was not, for God took him." When the great sad eyes were closed, Stanton said, "And now he belongs to the ages." A million soldiers sobbed, "My Captain, O my Captain!" A nation bowed its head in grief and hearts were washed with tears.

Thank God for Abraham Lincoln. However lightly the words may sometimes pass our lips, let us speak them now and always of this man, sincerely, solemnly, reverently; as so often dying soldiers and bereaved women and little children spoke them. Thank God for Abraham Lincoln—for the Lincoln who died and whose ashes rest at Springfield—for the Lincoln who lives in the hearts of the American people—in their widened sympathies and uplifted ideals. Thank God for the work he did, is doing, and is to do.

Thank God for Abraham Lincoln!

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